

Twenty-one additions to the avifauna of Benin

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Vingt-et-une additions à l'avifaune du Bénin. Le présent article documente la découverte de 13 espèces nouvelles pour le Bénin, principalement des oiseaux de mer et limicoles négligés par le passé (Océanite de Wilson *Oceanites oceanicus*, Fuligule nyroca *Aythya nyroca*, Oedicnème vermiculé *Burhinus vermiculatus*, Pluvier bronzé *Pluvialis dominica*, Vanneau terne *Vanellus lugubris*, Bécasseau maubèche *Calidris canutus*, Bécasseau roussâtre *C. subruficollis*, Labbe parasite *Stercorarius parasiticus*, Goéland railleur *Chroicocephalus genei*, Sterne voyageuse *Thalasseus bengalensis*, Guifette leucoptère *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Engoulevent du Natal *Caprimulgus natalensis* et Hirondelle à collier *Riparia cincta*), et de huit espèces dont la présence nécessitait confirmation (Sarcelle d'hiver *Anas crecca*, Messager sagittaire *Sagittarius serpentarius*, Poule sultane *Porphyrio porphyrio*, Jacana nain *Microparra capensis*, Bécasseau cocorli *Calidris ferruginea*, Coucou gris *Cuculus canorus*, Bergeronnette grise *Motacilla alba* et Anomalospize parasite *Anomalospiza imberbis*). Deux espèces introduites ou échappées de captivité sont rapportées : la première observation ouest-africaine du Corbeau familier *Corvus splendens* et la présence d'une petite population urbaine du Perroquet jaco *Psittacus erithacus* à Cotonou. L'ensemble de ces données porte à 566 le nombre d'espèces actuellement confirmées au Bénin.

Summary. We document 13 species that are new for Benin, mainly seabirds and shorebirds that were obviously overlooked in the past, as well as eight species whose presence required confirmation. The case of two escaped / introduced species is discussed: the first West African record of House Crow *Corvus splendens*, and the existence of a feral population of Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* in Cotonou. These additions bring the Benin list to a total of 566 species.

The first bird list for Benin (Dowsett 1993) numbered 423 species. Between 1993 and 2010, 58 additions to the country's avifauna, listed by Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire (2011), were published by various authors, while the Dowsetts themselves added another 74 species, rejected 28 species whose presence on the Benin list they considered to be erroneous, and listed a further 28 that required confirmation, mostly because convincing details were lacking (Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 2011).

The present paper reports 21 additional species: 13 newly discovered, eight that previously required confirmation and two introduced / escaped. Together with the recent discovery of Anambra Waxbill *Estrilda poliopareia* (Plomp *et al.* 2012), Long-legged Pipit *Anthus pallidiventris* (Thibault *et al.* 2012) and Little Rush Warbler *Bradypterus baboecala* (Merz *et al.* in prep.), the Benin list now stands at 566 species.

Initials of observers: Robert J. Dowsett (RJD), Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire (FDL), Alain Fossé (AF), Agnès Giannotti (AG), Julien Gonin (JG), Johannes Merz (JM), Sharon Merz (SM), Ewoud Plomp (EP), Wouter Plomp (WP), Bruno Portier (BP) and Peter Wiprächtiger (PW).

Additions to the avifauna of Benin

The following section lists 13 species for which there was no previously published record, eight of which are documented with photographs.

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

On 16 September 2012, during a whale-watching trip organised by a local conservation NGO (Nature Tropicale, www.naturetropicale.org), at least three were photographed c.20 km offshore at 06°10'54"N 02°33'38"E (BP; Figs. 1–2). They were identified by their combination of relatively small size, white rump, contrasting pale band on the upperwing-coverts, toes extending well beyond the tail, and typical wing structure (short 'arm' and long 'hand') producing a more pointed wing than in the notionally similar European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. Wilson's Storm-petrel breeds around Antarctica and is considered to be an uncommon to scarce non-breeding visitor to the Gulf of Guinea (Borrow & Demey 2001). It is probably regular in the region and had been overlooked due to the lack of pelagic observations in the country's waters.



Figures 1–2. Wilson’s Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, c.20 km off Cotonou, Benin, 16 September 2012 (Bruno Portier)

Océanite de Wilson *Oceanites oceanicus*, environ 20 km de Cotonou, Bénin, 16 septembre 2012 (Bruno Portier)

Figures 3–4. Ferruginous Ducks / Fuligules nyrocas *Aythya nyroca*, Île aux Oiseaux, Niger River, Benin, 1 March 2012 (Agnès Giannotti)

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Up to four were photographed on l’Île aux Oiseaux on the Niger River, in the extreme north of the country (c.12°05’N 03°12’E) on 26 February and 1 March 2012 (AG; Figs. 3–4) This Palearctic migrant is seldom observed south of the Niger River, but there are ten records in southern Niger, all in November–February (Source: NiBDaB; <http://www.nibdab.org>).

Water Thick-knee *Burhinus vermiculatus*

Two adults were observed in Cotonou harbour in May–June 2011 (Fig. 5); possibly the same birds were seen with an immature on 30 August 2011 (Fig. 7). Subsequently, groups of 4–10 birds were regularly observed in the same narrow, grassy, coastal belt dominated by *Remirea maritima*. All records to date are from the western harbour. However, with harbour enlargement works taking place since September 2011, suitable habitat is diminishing rapidly and the species has become more difficult to find since then. Since its plaintive call—slower, more drawn-out, melancholy and

less descending than that of Senegal Thick-knee *B. senegalensis*—became familiar to us, we regularly heard the species at night in Cotonou, suggesting that it was overlooked in the past. Fairly similar to Senegal Thick-knee (both visually and aurally), identification at a distance can be difficult. At close range, adults exhibit an obvious double white-and-black line above the grey wing panel (Figs. 5–6), which is diagnostic (the white line is lacking in *B. senegalensis*). The wing panel is less marked on immatures (Fig. 7). Vermiculations are only apparent at very close range or in photographs. In flight, the species shows a limited amount of white on the primaries (pp1–3 only). Senegal Thick-knee occurs near Togbin / Houndodji lagoon, just c.10 km west of Cotonou. The two species therefore overlap in the south of the country, as also reported in coastal Ghana (R. Dowsett & F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2013), raising the possibility of potential interbreeding. Togo’s coastal strip has been included within the range of Water Thick-knee but no records have been traced (Cheke & Walsh 1996).



Figures 5–6. Adult Water Thick-knees *Burhinus vermiculatus* in short coastal grassland dominated by *Remirea maritima*, Cotonou, Benin, 5 June 2011, and in flight, 26 October 2011 (Bruno Portier)

Oedicnèmes vermiculés *Burhinus vermiculatus* adultes dans les formations herbeuses côtières à *Remirea maritima*, Cotonou, Bénin, 5 juin 2011, et en vol, 26 October 2011 (Bruno Portier)

Figure 7. Immature Water Thick-knee / Oedicnème vermiculé *Burhinus vermiculatus*, Cotonou, Benin, 30 August 2011 (Bruno Portier)

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

In the morning of 24 September 2010, following a night of heavy rain, BP observed an adult golden plover *Pluvialis* in almost full breeding plumage

on the beach at Cotonou harbour (06°20'37"N 02°24'47"E), at the transition between salt-resistant vegetation and wet sand. Aware that European Golden Plover *P. apricaria* has not

been recorded so far south, BP considered it was probably an American *P. dominica* or Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva*.

The smaller size, slimmer jizz, smaller head, thin bill and dark, golden-toned back immediately excluded Grey Plover *P. squatarola*, which frequently occurs in the area. Given its black underparts, extending from the face to lower belly, and its well-marked golden-yellow upperparts, the bird was obviously an adult in breeding plumage. Paler feathers among the black of the breast and belly indicated the onset of moult. The broad white supercilium contrasting with the very dark cap and the much darker back made the bird appear different from typical European Golden Plover. The black of the belly extended further onto the flanks, almost reaching the wings. Although white spots of already moulted feathers made the transition irregular, the white 'shawl' did not continuously descend from the forehead to lower flanks as it does in European Golden Plover. The black of the lower belly, behind the legs, was also spotted with white and the undertail-coverts were more white than black.

After *c.* 10 minutes, the bird was disturbed by a fisherman and flew off, uttering a soft, distinctively trisyllabic and melodious whistle, the second syllable of which was slightly briefer and the last slightly higher pitched. Greyish underwings and axillaries (lacking pure white) with a narrow white stripe at the base of the primaries extending slightly onto the secondaries were clearly seen, definitely eliminating *P. apricaria*. Primary projection (number of primaries extending beyond the tertials) and leg length (tibia / tarsus ratio and whether or not the toes projected beyond the tail in flight) could not be appreciated.

Despite searching (with WP) *c.* 2 km of beach and several ponds the same afternoon and next day, the bird was not relocated. From the description, the lack of plaintive notes recalling the vocalisations of *P. apricaria* or *P. fulva*, and the late moult (*P. fulva* commences plumage renewal as early as July), the bird was identified as an American Golden Plover. This rare Nearctic vagrant has been encountered in several West African countries, including Senegal (where the species has been almost annual in recent years), Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Nigeria and Ghana, where there were two in 2005, four together from

November 2007 until January 2008 (Dowsett *et al.* 2008) and the species has been seen annually since (R. Dowsett & F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2013).

Senegal Lapwing (Lesser Black-winged Lapwing) *Vanellus lugubris*

Two adults were observed at Sô-Ava an hour before dusk on 22 November 2010 (JG). They were easily identified by their dull brown back, dull grey head and white front and throat. The species is an uncommon resident of open country on the coastal plain in Togo (Cheke & Walsh 1996).

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Two adults in non-breeding plumage were observed at Cotonou harbour on 30 November 2010 (BP). One moulting from first-winter plumage remained in the same area from 27 April until 5 May 2011 (BP & WP). Subsequently, an adult in non-breeding plumage was seen on 29 December 2011 and, probably the same individual, photographed on 2 February 2012 (Fig. 8; BP). Their relatively large size (compared to other sandpipers), greyish plumage, V-shaped markings on the flanks and streaked rump were diagnostic. This Palearctic migrant probably only occurs in small numbers on the coast during the boreal winter. In Togo, max. count is 16 at Lomé in February (Cheke & Walsh 1996).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris (Tryngites) subruficollis*

Two, apparently an adult and an immature, were observed at Cotonou harbour on 16 October 2011 (WP). They were seen again and photographed next day (Figs. 9–10), with one remaining on 20th. Unlikely to be confused, except perhaps with immature Ruff *C. (Philomachus) pugnax*, the latter was eliminated by their smaller size, small round head, short thin bill and more uniform buff-coloured head and underparts. The dark eye and yellow legs were also noticeable. In flight, a diagnostic dark half-crescent was visible on the primary-coverts (Fig. 11). The birds were aged based on the dark mantle and scapulars being more obviously pale-fringed in the immature, producing a more scaly appearance to the upperparts.



Figure 8. Adult winter Red Knot *Calidris canutus* with Sanderling *C. alba*, Cotonou, Benin, 2 February 2012 (Bruno Portier)

Bécasseau maubèche *Calidris canutus* avec Bécasseau sanderling *C. alba*, Cotonou, Bénin, 2 février 2012 (Bruno Portier)

Figures 9–11. Buff-breasted Sandpipers / Bécasseaux roussâtres *Calidris subruficollis*, Cotonou, Benin, 16–20 October 2011 (Bruno Portier)

The birds foraged in the short saltmarsh grasses dominated by *Remirea maritima* and *Ipomoea pes-caprae*, and avoided the mudflats. A massive influx of American vagrants occurred into Europe in autumn 2011, including a group of 23 Buff-breasted Sandpipers in Ireland on 25 September 2011, which was the largest-ever flock of this species in the Western Palearctic. The species was also recorded in several other West European countries, including Iceland, France, Denmark, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Spain (<http://www.netflug.dk>). In West Africa, this Near Threatened species has been recorded as a vagrant to Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Gabon (Borrow & Demey 2004).

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

On 28 September 2009, a skua, either this species or Pomarine *S. pomarinus*, was seen c.1 km off Grand Popo (BP). On 6 October 2010, a pale-morph immature (probably a second calendar-year) Arctic Skua *S. parasiticus* was observed chasing Royal Terns *Thalasseus maximus* c.200–300 m offshore at the mouth of Nokoué Lake, Cotonou (06°21'27"N 02°26'42"E; BP). It was identified by virtue of its medium size and jizz, and the lack of barring on the rump, which excludes Long-tailed Skua *S. longicaudus*. The

obvious white panel on the primaries (visible from above and below), the lack of a conspicuous dark breast-band, and the two short, pointed, central tail feathers projecting 2–3 cm beyond the other rectrices, excluded the more 'chesty' *S. pomarinus*. It was aged based on the paler-barred underwing-coverts and mottled belly and breast with a mix of cream and dark chocolate-brown feathers.

Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*

An adult in non-breeding plumage was photographed among Royal Terns at Bouches du Roy on 12 November 2010 (JG; Fig. 12). The only confusion risk is with non-breeding Grey-headed Gull *C. cirrocephalus*, but the longer bill, gently sloping forehead and white outer primaries (visible in Fig. 12) eliminate this species. A record from the same location in November 2011 may refer to the same individual (PW). These appear to be the easternmost records in the Gulf of Guinea.

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis*

On the morning of 9 September 2010, two mid-sized orange-billed terns were present on the beach at Cotonou harbour among a mixed flock of c.145 terns, comprising Royal, Sandwich *T. sandvicensis*, Common *Sterna hirundo* and Damara Terns *Sternula balaenarum* (BP). They were immediately



Figure 12. Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei* with Royal Terns *Thalasseus maximus*, Bouches du Roy, Benin, 12 November 2010 (Julien Gonin)

Goéland railleur *Chroicocephalus genei* avec Sternes royales *Thalasseus maximus*, Bouches du Roy, Bénin, 12 novembre 2010 (Julien Gonin)



Figure 13. Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* among Royal Terns *T. maximus*, Cotonou, 9 September 2010 (Bruno Portier)

Sterne voyageuse *Thalasseus bengalensis* avec Sternes royales *T. maximus*, Cotonou, Bénin, 9 septembre 2010 (Bruno Portier)

identified as adult Lesser Crested Terns in non-breeding plumage (BP being familiar with the species from Senegal) and were approached to within 30 m before they flew off seawards. In the evening, one was again present and an acceptable photograph was obtained (Fig. 13).

The following details, noted in the field, support the identification: size of Sandwich Tern (much smaller than Royal Tern in direct comparison), orange bill, white front / forehead, black cap behind the eye to nape, which was slightly crested, grey back / mantle and wing-coverts slightly darker than Royal Tern. In flight they had all-greyish upperparts (no white rump or tail) except a narrow white trailing edge to the secondaries and 3–4 darker (blackish) outer primaries. In flight, direct comparison with Royal Tern evidenced, aside of smaller size, the more conspicuous contrast between the upperparts and underparts (due to the slightly darker mantle and lack of white rump and tail). This is the easternmost record in the Gulf of Guinea.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

An adult in non-breeding plumage was observed moving west at sea with Royal Terns off Grand Popo (c.06°15'N 01°45'E) on 28 February 2010 (BP). It was separated from other *Chlidonias* by the very pale mantle with white rump and tail, and almost white upperwing except narrow dark grey line on the leading edge and black trailing edge to the 'arm' (dark shoulder and dark-tipped

secondaries). Black on the hindcrown and behind the eye was noted. Black Tern *C. niger* is overall darker above, whilst Whiskered Tern *C. hybrida* lacks such a contrasting upperwing and a white rump. Listed by Dowsett (1993) from an old record at Arli / Pendjari; this was subsequently queried because it was unclear on which side of the Benin / Burkina Faso border the bird had been recorded (R.J. Dowsett *in litt.* 2014). Must be regarded as a vagrant in Benin.

Swamp Nightjar *Caprimulgus natalensis*

An adult female was flushed six times from wet *Paspalum vaginatum* grassland in the Plaine du Sô, Basse Vallée de l'Ouémé (06°29'34"N 02°23'31"E) on 19 June 2011 (Figs. 14–15; BP). Three Little Bitterns *Ixobrychus minutus payesii* in the immediate vicinity provide some evidence of the wetness of the habitat. No other nightjar is known to favour such wet or swampy grassland habitat, but the bird was positively identified based on the following diagnostic characters:



Figures 14–15. Female Swamp Nightjar *Caprimulgus natalensis*, Sô-Ava, Benin, 19 June 2011 (Bruno Portier)
Engoulevent du Natal *Caprimulgus natalensis* femelle, Sô-Ava, Bénin, 19 juin 2011 (Bruno Portier)

obvious buff spot on the primaries (pp2–4), black-tipped primaries (pp1–4), narrow buff trailing edge to the secondaries, buffish outermost rectrices, buff-spotted upper breast, barred breast and flanks, and uniform buff lower belly. The bird was sexed as a female based on the buffish-coloured wing spots and outer primaries (white in male). Its obvious territorial attachment (the bird never moved further than 20–30 m) could suggest local breeding.

Banded Martin *Neophedina cincta*

Two were with Common Sand Martins *Riparia riparia*, Ethiopian Swallows *Hirundo aethiopica* and Barn Swallows *H. rustica* at Sô-Ava, Plaine du Sô, Basse Vallée de l'Ouémé, on 21 March 2010 (WP). They were much larger than the other hirundines present and exhibited a well-defined, broad brown breast-band contrasting with the otherwise white underparts. The tail was square-ended (not forked). Their dashing flight (as the birds chased each other) was more reminiscent of a small falcon than swallows, and was very different from the more fluttering flight of Common Sand Martin.

Species whose presence in Benin required confirmation

The eight species below were listed by Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire (2011) as requiring confirmation, mostly because published details were insufficient to be sure of their identification or on which side of the border they had been observed.

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

A male in breeding plumage was observed on the Mare Fogou, Pendjari National Park, on 14 March 2012 (WP & EP). The water level at this season was extremely low and the area had the aspect of a large marsh, with many herons, two Saddle-billed Storks *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*, Black Crowned Cranes *Balearica pavonina* and a bathing African Elephant *Loxodonta africana*. Other wildfowl included a few Knob-billed Ducks *Sarkidiornis melanotos*, White-faced Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna viduata* and Spur-winged Geese *Plectropterus gambensis*. The teal did not associate with these larger ducks but swam apart, close to a Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and a Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*. The

bird was rather distant, but observed through the telescope its identification was straightforward: a small greyish duck with a reddish-brown head and dark green band from the eye to nape, yellowish undertail, and a horizontal white stripe on the scapulars.

Secretary-bird *Sagittarius serpentarius*

Infrequently encountered by W. Delvingt and J. Verschuren in Pendjari National Park in 1985–87 (Delvingt *et al.* 1989). B. Sinsin (pers. comm.) also reported an undated sighting from the same park in 1995–96.

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

An adult was seen feeding two large chicks on a suburban pond at Godomey, in the north-west suburbs of Cotonou (06°22'59"N 02°20'37"E) on 30 January 2011 (BP). At the same locality, an immature was observed on 20 February 2011 (BP) and at least three, including two juveniles, on 8 April 2012 (WP). Their size, long legs, heavy bill, blue plumage and green back of the adult eliminate confusion with the smaller Allen's Gallinule *Porphyryula alleni*. The feeding behaviour (extracting marrow from *Typha*) is also typical of the present species. In March–May 2012, the species was seen regularly: an adult was at Cotonou harbour on 16 March 2012 (Fig. 16), followed by a pair with two large chicks on 30 March 2012. Singles were seen occasionally in April–May on three *Typha*-bordered ponds in and around Cotonou (BP & WP). A belated record from April 2009 in a temporary pond (since filled in) between the Novotel and Marina Hotel in Cotonou, probably also refers to this species (WP).

Lesser Jacana *Microparra capensis*

One was photographed on l'Île aux Oiseaux on the Niger River, in the extreme north of the country (c.12°05'N 03°12'E) on 1 March 2012 (AG; Fig. 17). A second record was made in the south of the country, where one was seen on a large pool covered with floating vegetation along the Zou River (07°12'36"N 02°17'24"E) on 28 June 2012 (BP). The prominent white supercilium, white underparts, small size and contrasting upperwing (paler coverts versus dark flight feathers) excluded confusion with juvenile African Jacana *Actophilornis africana*. Widely but



Figure 16. Adult Purple Swamphen / Poule sultane *Porphyrio porphyrio* with Pied Crow *Corvus albus*, Cotonou harbour, Benin, 16 March 2012 (Bruno Portier)

Poule sultane *Porphyrio porphyrio* adulte avec Corbeau pie *Corvus albus*, port de Cotonou, Bénin, 16 mars 2012 (Bruno Portier)

Figure 17. Lesser Jacana / Jacana nain *Microparra capensis*, Île aux Oiseaux, Niger River, Benin, 1 March 2012 (Agnès Giannotti)



patchily distributed, the species has not been recorded in Togo, Ghana or southern Nigeria.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

An immature was photographed at Cotonou harbour on 17 September 2011 (BP; Fig. 18), with three adults in non-breeding plumage in the same area on 17–21 October 2011 (WP & BP; Fig. 19). Subsequently, six were seen at Sô-Ava on 15 December 2012 (SM & JM), suggesting that the species is probably annual, albeit uncommon.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Recently confirmed, with several records during spring migration: three, including a rufous female, near Agbon in wooded grassland near the dam (c.08°12'N 01°58'E) on 12 April 2011, one in Monts Kouffé on 13 April 2011 (c.08°32'N

01°58'E) and one on layon 12 in Lama Forest on 26 April 2011 (c.06°59'N 02°05'E) (all RJD & FDL). Appears heavier and stockier in flight than African Cuckoo *C. gularis*, with much less yellow at the base of the bill; female African Cuckoo lacks a rufous (hepatic) form (Payne 2005). The species is probably overlooked, due to the difficulty of distinguishing it from African Cuckoo.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

On 6 and 10 November 2010, an adult in non-breeding plumage was seen by BP at a small pond in Cotonou harbour. The almost all-white head, black eye and bill, grey back becoming darker on the nape and hindcrown, black breast-band becoming narrower on the neck-sides, two narrow white wingbars (greater and median wing-coverts tipped white) and lack of white wing panel



Figure 18. Immature Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, with Sanderlings *C. alba*, Cotonou, Benin, 17 September 2011 (Bruno Portier)

Bécasseau cocorli *Calidris ferruginea* immature avec Bécasseau sanderling *C. alba*, Cotonou, Bénin, 17 septembre 2011 (Bruno Portier)



Figure 19. Adult winter Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* (on right) with Sanderling *C. alba* and Little Stint *C. minuta*, Cotonou, Benin, 18 October 2011 (Bruno Portier)

Bécasseau cocorli *Calidris ferruginea* adulte en plumage d'hiver avec Bécasseau sanderling *C. alba* et Bécasseau minute *C. minuta*, Cotonou, Bénin, 18 octobre 2011 (Bruno Portier)

exclude confusion with African Pied Wagtail *M. aguimp*, which is also present at the same site. A poor-quality photograph (seen by the editors) was obtained using a telescope, but is not suitable for publication. This may constitute the second country record following one at Bétérou in 1995 (Claffey 1995) and is the first for southern Benin, where the species is a vagrant. Considered a rare Palearctic migrant in Togo by Cheke & Walsh (1986) with two records, in January 1987 and September 1991.

Cuckoo Finch *Anomalospiza imberbis*

One in non-breeding plumage was seen in seasonally wet grassland with scattered clumps of trees on the Zou River floodplain of Domè (c.07°04'N 02°20'E) on 17 April 2011 (RJD). Subsequently, the species was found at Sô-Ava, Plaine du Sô, Basse Vallée de l'Ouémé, where singles in non-breeding plumage were observed on 1 December 2012 (SM & JM; Fig. 20) and 9 December 2012 (BP). Despite a previous record from southern Benin, on 1 July 2002 (Claffey

2003), the species was considered to require confirmation by Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire (2011).

Introduced / escaped species

The following two species were recorded in the wild but they were obviously either introduced by Man or ship-assisted.

Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus*

Without suggesting a wild origin for the species in Benin (cagebirds are readily available on local markets), we report the presence of a significant feral population in Cotonou (06°21'N 02°26'E). Groups of 3–5 (once seven) are often seen and heard in tall trees and wooded gardens, sometimes forming noisy flocks with Senegal Parrot *Poicephalus senegalus*. In BP's garden, birds were observed feeding on *Terminalia catappa* nuts (Combretaceae). Birds are of the nominate subspecies and are especially vocal at sunrise in the early rains (April–June), remaining more silent during the rest of the year.



Figure 20. Cuckoo Finch / Anomalospiza parasite *Anomalospiza imberbis*, Sô-Ava, Benin, 1 December 2012 (Sharon & Johannes Merz)

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

One, chased by a pair of Pied Crows *C. albus*, was observed in the gardens of the Presidency in Cotonou (06°21'01"N 02°24'30"E) on 6 February 2010. Just c.500 m from Cotonou harbour, the bird was doubtlessly ship-assisted. It was seen again on several occasions (12 May and 16 September 2010, 14, 19 and 20 March, 6 April and 27 December 2011) with a group of Pied Crows in the harbour area (BP). Noticeably smaller than Pied Crow and wholly glossy black, except the dark ash-grey nape, head-sides, upper back and breast (Fig. 21), with a proportionately large bill and steep forehead.

This appears to be the first record for West Africa and the only one on the Atlantic coast of Africa (Ryall 2010), except those recently reported in Namibia (see Recent Reports, this issue). The species originates from South Asia (Madge & Burn 1994) and has successfully invaded—by introduction or ship-assisted passage—tropical, subtropical and even temperate regions well beyond its native range. In Africa, it occurs from Egypt to South Africa as well as in Seychelles and

on Mauritius. It has been recorded as a vagrant in Morocco (on the Mediterranean coast), Europe (Spain, France, Ireland and the Netherlands) and at several locations in the Americas and Australia (Ryall 2010).

Discussion

Despite a significant number of additions to the Benin list since 1993 and the last update being as recently as 2011, this paper, which adds a total of 21 species, demonstrates how incomplete our knowledge of the avifauna of Benin remains, as several species discovered recently appear to be common or nearly so. Ornithological research has received very little attention from the few native biologists, and few foreign ornithologists have published on the Benin avifauna in recent decades. We therefore applaud recent initiatives by some local NGOs aimed at developing ecotourism and bird tourism in the country. We hope it may inspire birdwatchers to visit Benin, where safe, easy, affordable and off-the-beaten tracks trips can be organised. Several taxa, including African Black Swift *Apus barbatus*, Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* and others, have been claimed but require confirmation. Readers are encouraged to visit the recently updated Benin



Figure 21. House Crow / Corbeau familier *Corvus splendens*, Cotonou, Benin, 6 April 2011 (Bruno Portier)

pages on the ABC website which provide a wide range of ornithological and logistical information (<http://www.africanbirdclub.org/countries/Benin/introduction>).

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